THE CIVIL WAR IN KENTUCKY: THE SLAVE CLAIMS HIS FREEDOM

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When William E. Woodward published his biography, *Meet General Grant,* in 1928, he confidently concluded that "the American negros [sic] are the only people in the history of the world, that ever became free without any effort of their own."[1] Although his dogmatic comment went unchallenged, it would not be accepted today, and his statement is certainly not true with reference to the blacks in Kentucky during the Civil War. From the beginning of the Civil War, the Kentucky slaves were active particpants in the drama. From the moment Northern troops entered Kentucky, the objective of the slaves was to secure more self-determinism for themselves and their families.

During the spring and summer of 1861 in Kentucky, the signs of what was to come were clear. Newspaper columns carried more and more notices of runaways. Instances of insubordination increased sharply, and there were reports of work slowdowns, unruliness, and arson. In May 1861, great alarm spread across Kentucky as rumors of slave uprisings and insurrectional plots convulsed the states with fear. Slave plots were said to have been exposed or uprisings undertaken in Fayette, Owen, and Gallatin Counties.[2]

The uneasiness and apprehensions concerning the effects of abolitionist ideas on the slaves led to concerted efforts to isolate the slave communities from information about the issues of the war. After the armies moved into Kentucky, many Kentucky slaveholders tried to frighten the slaves into avoiding conversation with strangers and Northern soldiers. Harry Smith's Kentucky master told him that the Yankees would steal and sell him. "Do not pass a word with those Yankees," his master warned. The slaveholders in the region of Columbus, Kentucky, told their slaves that the Yankees had horns, and that they ate Negro "babies, and . . . lived in the North in houses built of snow and ice," and that the Yankee soliders were fighting to take the blacks back north "where they would freeze to death." When the Northern soliders arrived in a community, the slaves related these stories with much amusement. Despite the master's attempt to insulate the slaves from contact with the outside world, the blacks learned much about the war and spent hours discussing its effects on slavery. The slaves would eavesdrop at the door when whites were discussing the war or holding council, and sometimes the slaves induced literate yeomen to read to them about the war.[3] In Simpsonville, Kentucky, Elijah Marrs was given the task of going to town to pick up the mail for his master. As he could read, Marrs kept the other slaves in the neighborhood informed by reading newspapers mailed to his master.[4]

During his tour through Kentucky in the summer of 1861, Alan Pinkerton, an intel-

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ligence officer for the United States War Department, conversed with a Bowling Green slaveholder about the knowledge slaves had acquired concerning the war. "There has been so much talk about the matter all through the State" that the blacks "know as much about it as we do . . . and too much for our safety and peace of minds," concluded the slaveholder. A Crittenden County, Kentucky, slaveholder wrote a friend that the blacks were "so free" and considered slavery "such a sin" that owners would be better off if the slaves were sold to the South.[5]

Since the whites were aware that the slaves had cause to resist continuing in bondage and that the war might furnish the occasion and resources for rebellion, the war years were an uneasy period for the Kentucky slaveholder. A delegation of citizens of Paducah protested to General E. A. Paine against arms carried by the black servants of the officers of the Ninth Illinois Regiment. The citizens were not only uneasy about the use the blacks in the Ninth Illinois Regiment might make of the weapons, but were concerned about the example they might set for the Paducah slaves. Since the servants had been armed to prevent kidnapping, they remained armed despite the protest. Whether the armed servants affected the local slaves is uncertain, but General F. Smith was called on to restore order and quiet a revolt, on a farm in McCracken County, among a dozen or more slaves, who supposed they were free because the soldiers had come.[6]

As the formation of the Kentucky military units was accelerated and the regiments from the Northwest began to move into Kentucky, it was impossible to prevent the slaves from coming in contact with the soliders. When the Union troops began to arrive from the Northwest in great numbers, the action of the slaves revealed that few had been so naive as to accept the exaggerated stories that the whites had told them. Some few gullible slaves continued to fear the Union soliders, but others were of the sentiment of the slave who said to the solider: "I thought you must be downright heathen, but you are real good-looking people and don't seem to do nobody no harm."[7]

In many communities, when the Northern soliders arrived the blacks turned out *en masse*. The soldiers described the slaves as friendly and kind, intelligent and "loyal to the man."[8] If the blacks lacked refined knowledge of the issues at stake in the war, their common-sense judgment and instincts drew them to the Union cause. As the Fifty-Eighth Indiana Infantry moved across Kentucky in the Autumn of 1861, an old black lady greeted them with enthusiasm and said: "God bless de soldus. I'se glad to see 'em come." Early in November, 1861, when an Ohio regiment marched into Elizabethtown, Kentucky, it was greeted by a massive turnout of the slaves. The attention of the soldiers were drawn toward an old Negro woman as she paraded along the street crying, "Hurray for de Union. Go on gemmen, I saw de Union once; it was de best Union I eber saw." On March 5, 1862, the Twenty-Eighth Illinois Regiment left Camp Heiman and marched along the Tennessee River. When it passed a farm house, several blacks stood by the fence cheering the soldiers. A very ancient woman was the center of attention. With her arms stretched toward Heaven, she shouted over and over: "God bless Massa Lincoln!" until her voice died out in the distance as the soliders moved downstream. A large number of slaves believed that God had foreordained a millenial destruction of servitude during their lifetime. The Civil War seemed to many slaves to be the time that was set aside for the Providential deliverance. Early in 1862 the soldiers of the Eighth Kentucky Infantry witnessed a scene which revealed

the faith the slaves had in a millenial deliverance. As they steamed down the Cumberland River, they observed approximately fifty slaves dancing on the shore as their leader sang:

> O, praise and tanks! de Lord he come
> To set de people free an' massa tink it day of doom
> An' we of jublee.

The slaves believed that the Union army as God's instrument of deliverance. A soldier of the Twenty-Fifth Wisconsin Infantry wrote his family that the slaves in Kentucky could not "talk two minutes but tears come to their eyes and they threw their arms up and down and praised de Lord for de coming of the Lincoln soliders." As the War wore on, the slaves became more convinced that the day of jubilee was at hand. Early in 1863 the Chaplain of the Third Minnesota Regiment who was in charge of contrabands at Fort Heiman, Kentucky, wrote the editor of the *Northwestern Christian Advocate* that the religious meetings in the camp consisted of "a general and tumultuous rejoicing at the unbound mercy of God, and the coming of the jubilee." The chaplain quoted some of their songs which were full of hope and anticipation of their deliverance by God from slavery. As the slaves sang he scribbled down parts of their hymns:

> "Oh Canaan, sweet Canaan, I's boun for de lan' of Canaan"; and "Dah's a better day comin In de Army of de Lord."[9]

By the last half of 1862 the soldiers from the Northwest were often going beyond the generalization that the slaves of Kentucky were intelligent, true, and loyal to the Union. In October, 1862, a soldier of the Ninth Ohio Regiment described the Kentucky slaves as being alert and "very anxious to know every step" that was taken by the Union Government in reference to slavery. "I tell you, they are not so ignorant of political matters as some suppose," he informed the editor of a Democratic journal back in northern Ohio. In November, a soldier with the Nineteenth Ohio Battery in Kentucky reported to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that the slaves kept informed concerning the military affairs. "They are posted on all the important battles that have taken place—particularly in their own State. They are decidedly true to the Union—every one of them," he added.[10]

When a soldier in Kentucky with Colonel James A. Garfield's regiment wrote the *Cincinnati Gazette* that the Kentucky slaves were well treated and content, a member of the Forty-First Ohio Regiment, who regularly visited Kentucky farms to buy hay, challenged the statement. "A fire of hate and hope" slumbered in the bosom of the slave and unless quenched by some means," it would yet burst forth, and give terrible demonstration that the spirit of man, like the justice of God, will not always sleep." A chaplain with the Thirty-Eighth Ohio Regiment in Kentucky reported that the slaves were determined to secure their freedom. While the troops drilled below, the chaplain stood on a cemetery hill with an old slave, who was bent low with age and toil, and discussed the hopes of freedom for which the slaves yearned. While the old man stood in deep thought "a wild sterm glean" came from his eyes, "his lips trembled, and his breast heaved." The chaplain saw that "the spirit of freedom" had taken "possession of his soul." When the sounds of the military band faded away from below, the old

man broke the silence: "I'se berry ol massa, but de little ones—dey'l see it; dey'l see it yit."[11]

The progress of events unsettled the slaves and loosened the bonds of servitude so completely that large numbers of slaves from Kentucky sought freedom north of the Ohio River. The slaves became better informed and more mobile. An informed observer of Owensboro, Kentucky, believed that the number of slaves crossing the Ohio River in a four-month period in 1861 compared favorably with the number making the journey during the last half of the century. In Henry County, Kentucky, a party of slaves belonging to both Union and Southern sympathizers fled to Indiana with a wagon supplied with provisions.[12] In January, 1862, a group of about forty to sixty blacks were engaged in killing hogs at night in New Castle, Kentucky. After completing their chores, they paraded about the streets in a body for approximately two hours singing political songs and shouting for Lincoln. They seemed to take special pains to make their unusual and disorderly demonstration in front of the dwellings of one or two prominent Southern Rights citizens.[13]

The chief attraction to the Kentucky slave, however, was the Union army and the Union camps. A nucleus of a black community existed in the army from the beginning. Some Union officers from Kentucky took their personal servants with them when they entered service, and a considerable number of officers from the Northwest, particularly those from Illinois, hired free blacks as servants when they enlisted.[14]

At first the slaves who sought out Union camps came singly from adjoining farms after striking up an acquaintance with the soldiers. By the end of 1861 slaves began to come into the Union lines in large groups. A correspondent at a camp near Nolin, Kentucky, reported in November, 1861, that "a batch of eight slaves arrived in camp from the Green River County." The party which included one or two who had been there before were turned over to the provost marshal, who was puzzled to know what to do with them. During the same month a group of slaves came into camp Haycroft from southern Kentucky. They claimed their masters were in the Confederate army. In January, 1862, a group of ten slaves entered the camp at Mumfordsville. They reported that they had been seized by the Confederates in Bowling Green and had made their escape. The policy of the army in Kentucky was to turn the slaves out of the camps, and although the generals sent a steady stream of orders to the regiments to keep the slaves out of the lines, the soliders and their field officers generally refused to obey the orders. A correspondent from the camp at Paducah asserted that each company in the regiment employed five or six blacks, and the number was growing by night and day until it had reached epidemic proportions. The slaves soon learned that they would be more freely received if they reported that they were free blacks or that their masters were Confederates. Slaves owned by Conferderates and used for military purposes were retained by the Army. The slaves who came into the Union lines from Kentucky were often servants of Unionists, but to the slaves it really did not matter whether their masters were Southern or Union sympathizers as their freedom was just as precious as that of a slave who had a rebel master.[15]

By early September, 1862, the disorganizing and abrasive effects of the war in Kentucky had all but destroyed slavery. The invasion of Kentucky by Kirby Smith and Braxton Bragg in the Autumn of 1862 did irreparable damage to the institution of slavery in Kentucky. The people living in the countryside fled before the Confederate

invaders. The slaves were entering the Union army camps in an endless stream. On September 2, 1862, an Ohio solider reported that about six hundred slaves entered the camp at Lebanon, Kentucky, that day.[16]

The war undermined the exclusive authority of the master over the slave. When the master went off to war, discipline began to break down on the plantation. Invasion of Kentucky by a Confederate cavalry or army caused loyal Union slaveholders to flee to Union camps. Since the Union slaveholders could not protect their slaves against the Confederate invaders, many slaves had to look to their own safety. The slaves fled to the protection of the army camp from all directions. The slaves quickly learned that authority and protection resided with the army, and the control of the slaveowner over the slave was undermined. When the Union armies moved into areas of Kentucky which had been formerly held by Confederate forces, slaveholders who had sympathized with the Southern army fled to the South leaving their property and slaves behind. These slaves immediately assumed the posture of free blacks.[17]

Slavery had existed as a viable institution to a large extent because the slave did not have freedom of movement, did not receive wages for his work, and could be subjected to corporal punishment at the will of the master. By December 1862, the Kentucky slaves were moving about in such numbers that it was impossible to exercise any control over them. The mobility of slaves was almost as free as that of white laborers. It became quite common for slaves to desert the farms and plantations because they had been whipped by the slave owner or his agent. Many slaveholders tried to appeal to reason as a substitute for the whip. The public jails were full of slaves, and private slave pens were established by many whites, but the slaves had become so mobile that it was impossible to limit their freedom of movement. It was not uncommon for the slaves of Kentucky to insist that they have a voice in deciding what they would plant, and frequently slaves would ask that they be paid a wage for their labor. The Union army had paid slaves for their labor when they were impressed into labor battalions, and the slaves began to expect the payment of wages. Some of the slaveholders were obliged to pay their slaves to gather the crops in 1862. When wages were refused, the slave often fled from the plantation. Slaveowners tried to force slaves to return by threatening to prosecute anyone who employed their slaves for wages or subsistence, but the slaves often lived on the verge of starvation rather than return to servitude. Slaveholders tried to check the growing tendency of slaves to abandon slavery by threatening to sell the slave's wife or children. A correspondent to the *Boston Journal* wrote from Cincinnati and Louisville that the slaveholders along the borderlands of the South had been obliged to hire their own slaves to gather in the crops. "The Negroes are ready to work for pay, but they refuse to work for nothing," he explained. In Louisville, he reported that a great revolution was underway, but "the change promises to be bloodless," he assured the editor. The correspondent concluded that the master's authority had been compromised. "They [the masters] have been compelled to cease flogging, for it is very easy for slaves to run away now, anad not easy to catch them," he added. Peter Bruner, a slave residing in Estill County, Kentucky, fled from his owner and worked for others for wages only if they agreed to pay him by the day. In 1863 he made an agreement to work a farm for half of what he produced.[18]

When Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, 1862, it was taken as a signal by the Kentucky slaves to rush into the lines of the Union

army. Mary Crane, a slave in LaRue County, Kentucky, at the time, vividly recalled the event years later. "When President Lincoln issued his proclamation, freeing the negroes [sic]," she recollected, "I remember that my father and most of the other younger slave men left the farms to join the Union army."[19] After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, the steady stream of contraband slaves that had been drifting into Kentucky turned into a torrent from Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi because of the abrasion resulting from the action of the military forces and the impact of the proclamation on the war. The Kentucky slave recognized no geographical limitation on the proclamation. Whether the Kentucky slaves stayed on the farm or joined the mass movement to the army camps located in the state and along the Ohio River was a personal decision made by the slave without regard for the authority of the slaveholder. By June 1863, the chaplain at Columbus, Kentucky, reported that he was in charge of about a thousand contrabands.[20] The state authorities of Kentucky tried to check the movement of slaves through the state by jailing all slaves who were found abroad without passes. County sheriffs seized the fugitives and advertised for the owner to claim the slave. The law required that slaves be sold only after confinement of eight months, but the law broke down due to the massive number of slaves who refused to adhere to the slave codes. The Kentucky legislature changed the law to limit confinement to thirty days before auction and sale. But still the law was ineffective to check the new mobility of slaves. In the larger cities the jails were filled and slaves were sent to rural counties for confinement. When slaves were sold to new owners by a sheriff's auction, many escaped again within a few hours. Many owners resorted to private pens to try to restore order, but slaves continued to roam at will.[21]

In April 1863, Kentucky's futile effort to prevent freedom of movement of the slaves was checked by a ruling of Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt that slaves from Confederate states coming into Kentucky could not be confined because they were under the Articles of War, the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, and the Emancipation Proclamation.[22] Failing to control the movement of slaves into the state and across Kentucky's borders, the authorities could not check intrastate movement of Kentucky's slaves. The Kentucky slaves refused to recognize any distinction. By November 1863, the *Nashville Union* was informed by a Kentucky slaveholder that "a very large proportion of slave owners" in Kentucky admitted that "slavery was hopelessly destroyed" in the state. The correspondent reported that in one southern county, in the state, a hundred and fifty slaves had deserted the institution, and that trouble was increasing.[23]

Early in 1863 the War Department began to enlist slaves for military service, but when protests were carried to Washington from Kentucky, Lincoln agreed that no Kentucky slave would be entlisted in Kentucky if the state could fill her quota from whites. The Kentucky slaves effectively undermined the new policy by fleeing across Kentucky's borders to enlist in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Tennessee. Since these men were lost to Kentucky's quota, the Union men in Kentucky agitated in Washington and secured a change of policy in 1864 so that Kentucky slaves were enlisted in Kentucky, and credited to the state's quota.[24]

The enlisted slaves became free men, a circumstance which in itself weakened the institution of servitude in Kentucky. Although the black recruit's family remained in

servitude, the enlistment of the blacks in Kentucky set into motion a reaction which quickened the deterioration of slavery in the state. In many cases, when black Kentucky recruits entered training camps, they were accompanied or followed to the camp by the soliders' families. In numerous cases, black families made their way to army camps after they were forced off the farm, mistreated, or threatened by the slaveholder who acted in resentment because the able-bodied males and joined the army. Occasionally, in blind anger and rage, the farmer would pull the cabin down so that the women and children would have no lodging. The refugee camps that sprang up around the army camps in Kentucky were centers of unbelievable hardship and suffering, and the black soliders complained long and loud about the treatment of their families. Reports came to headquarters in Kentucky that large numbers of blacks had offered to enlist provided their families were freed or provided they had assurance that the Army would protect their families. In November 1864, the Colonel of the Seventy-Second U.S. Colored Infantry at Covington, Kentucky, reported that a large number of slaves "offered to enlist" provided that "they had assurances" that the Government would free their families or the Army would protect their families from the cruelty of their masters. The provost marshal of the first district (Puducah) in Kentucky reported to his superiors that the great obstacle in recruiting blacks was the security of the slave families. "*Attend to their wifes and families* and they will immediately rush to arms," the Colonel predicted. Individual recuriting officers permitted black recruits to bring their families along to the camp when they enlisted and promised that the Army would care for them.[25]

The controversy concerning the status of black soldiers' families came to a head at Camp Nelson, Kentucky, late in November 1864, when orders were carried out to expel some four hundred women and children from the Camp. The refugee camp was leveled and the half-starved, half-naked refugees were forced to wander along the highways and through the woods in a destitute condition on the coldest night of the season.[26]

The black soldiers were in a rage and it was all John Fee, and the other missionary friends of the blacks, could do to restrain them from resistance. Four months later Fee recalled that the black soldiers in Camp Nelson "were very indignant" at the treatment of their families. "I did on more than one instance use my influence . . . to induce them not to show resistence," he added.[27] The occasion was used by the missionaries to secure a change of policy which required that the dependents of the black soldiers be provided for by the War Department in refugee camps.[28] Benjamin Wade had visited Camp Nelson to investigate conditions there before the episode of November 1864, and letters had been sent to Henry Wilson, chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, and to others in Washington to convince them that morale of the black soliders in Kentucky was being destroyed by the mistreatment of their families. It was pointed out that there was a need to place black dependents in circumstances where the army could legally protect them, and the friends of the blacks in Kentucky urged that black soliders' dependents be freed by law. Several highly placed Army officers indicated that slave recruiting in Kentucky would dry up if the black recruits' families were not freed. The Camp Nelson tradegy led directly to the law granting freedom to the dependents of black soliders.[29]

Informed military authorities in Kentucky estimated that two-thirds of the remaining

slaves in Kentucky were granted freedom by the act freeing families of black soliders. Brevet General James Brisbin, who served in Kentucky, estimated that on an average five dependents were freed each time a black solider enlisted in Kentucky. Since the enlistment of blacks in Kentucky continued after the war had ended, until June 1, 1865, the provisions for freeing black soldiers' families enabled the Kentucky slaves to gain their freedom as well as the freedom of their families for more than six weeks after the war had come to an end. Although administrative officers and circuit judges in Kentucky declared the law freeing the families of black soliders inoperative and unconstitutional in Kentucky, John Palmer, the Commander of the Department of Kentucky, enforced the law with vengeance.[30]

The Army became actively involved in the destruction of slavery in Kentucky by the end of 1864, but the policies initiated by both General S. G. Burbridge and his successor, General John Palmer, would have come to nothing if large numbers of slaves in Kentucky had not taken the initiative by passively refusing to act the part of slaves any longer. The refusal of many slaves to work without receiving compensation for their labor was the most significant area in which the slave refused to play his traditional role. Two years of contact with the Army had taught the slaves much about the wage system. When the Army impressed Kentucky slaves into labor batallions for work on the railroads, the slaves of secessionists received the payment for the work they performed, and even when the slaves' wages were paid directly to loyal owners, the slaves were paid incentive wages. General William Rosecrans, Commander of the Department of the Cumberland, which covered parts of Kentucky and Tennessee, concluded in Arpil 1863 that slavery was dead. "There is not a negro [sic] in the South who does not know he is free," he added. He wrote his father that the blacks "squatted on the planations, and refused to work for any one but themselves. They have sown little crops of their own, and their masters have ceased to exercise any control over them."[31] Brigadier General Payne initiated a program on the Kentucky-Tennessee border to sponsor a project by which slaves would be hired to work for their former owners for wages. On June 1, 1863, Payne reported that this plan was "working admirably.[32]

The departure of slaves from Kentucky to the Northeast as wage earners, the movement of blacks to the towns and cities, and the enlistment of the Kentucky slaves in military service, all combined to create an acute labor shortage in Kentucky by 1865. A farmer in Jefferson County lost sixty-three slaves during the course of the season of 1865, and his wife and daughters were forced to take up the task of farm laborers and domestics.[33] Many Kentucky farmers decided to come to terms with their slaves by using the assistance of the Army. A group came to Palmer and asked for relief and he agreed to cooperate with them in securing the return of blacks to agricultural pursuits provided the farmers would declare in writing that their slaves would be regarded as hired laborers who would receive wages for their labor. The military authorities in Kentucky recognized the blacks, who returned to the soil, as liberated slaves, and agreed to furnish protection to them and to enforce wage payments. Although the Army encouraged the Kentucky blacks who had abandoned slavery to enter into labor agreements with humane masters, few slaves who had broken with their former masters were willing to return to them. Returning to the supervision of the old masters seemed too much like a voluntary return to the life of a slave. The farmers had more success

in retaining slaves who had not yet made a decision to leave their masters. A great number of slaveholders in Kentucky decided to recognize that slavery no longer existed. They made wage contracts with their slaves and the departure of the laborers from their farms was checked. By September 1865, three months before slavery was abolished in Kentucky by the Thirteenth Amendment, many farmers reported that the wage system was beneficial to both the white farmers and the black laborers.[34]

As the end of the War drew near, the blacks abandoned slavery in Kentucky in increased numbers. The rural areas were being depleated of laborers by the mass movement of blacks to the Kentucky cities and towns. It was impossible to determine which blacks had become legally free by the military service of a father or son. The fugitives created a crisis in the cities which local authorities hopelessly tried to resolve by filling the jails and the private pens with blacks. Finally the local authorities in desperation turned to General Palmer and urged him to remove the transient blacks from the cities to prevent an outbreak of an epidemic. Palmer insisted that the solution of the problem required that the state and local governments accept the existing reality and recognize the blacks as free men. Since potential employers feared prosecution if they employed the self-made freedmen, Palmer undertook to resolve the dilemma the Kentucky slaves had forced on the community. He published an order authorizing post commanders to issue passes to all blacks that applied for them, regardless of status, to travel abroad to find employment. The blacks chose to consider these passes as freedom papers and thus made the pass system an effective instrument to complete the destruction of slavery in Kentucky. The practical effect of the pass system was to remove the last shackles of servitude by establishing complete freedom of movement six months before the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified.[35] If the states had failed to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, the Kentucky slaves would have still maintained their self-determinism. When the Kentucky legislature failed to ratify the amendment for the second time in May 1865, many Kentucky slaves rushed into the ranks of the Army to secure their freedom and others left Kentucky for the Northwest. Since the Fugitive Slave Law had been abolished by the Act of June 28, 1864, there was no Federal Authority to return fugitives to Kentucky. If necessary many Kentucky slaves were willing to act out the words of the folk-song sung by slaves during the Civil War:

> Before I be a slave
> I'll be buried in my grave,
> And go home to my Lord
> And be free.

Lincoln's insights were correct when he informed one of his generals that "those who shall have tasted actual freedom can never be slaves again."[36]

Slavery ceased to be a viable institution in Kentucky long before the Thirteenth Amendment was adopted. The disintegration of slavery started shortly after massive troop movements began to take place in Kentucky, and by the end of 1863 slavery in the state had suffered afflictions that left no hope for its reestablishment as it had existed in antebellum Kentucky.

The initiative taken by the masses of blacks lay at the heart of slavery's decline in Kentucky. Blacks recognized the war as an opportunity to lessen their burdens, and they began to take advantage of the situation almost from the start of the conflict. In spite of the military orders that slavery should be left alone, aided and abetted by the

Northern soliders, the slaves undermined the institution of slavery and nullified Kentucky's laws that sustained it. Large numbers of slaves abandoned the institution and rushed into the Union lines to support the Union cause, with or without the consent of the Army. The bondsmen simply refused to continue to act the part of slaves and they proved to be accomplished actors who performed a critical role in the Civil War.

In spite of Lincoln's determination to support the antebellum order in Kentucky, the slaves, in Kentucky as elswhere in the Upper South, disregarded Lincoln's slave policy. The action of the Kentucky slaves reduced Lincoln's slave policy and the Kentucky slave code to a shamble so that little effective control remained and thereby put great pressure on Lincoln to abandon his border state policy and issue his Emancipation Proclamation.

When the War ended, Kentucky still remained "a white's man's government" that was incapable of embracing either racial equality or a commitment to balance individual liberties with social justice.[37] The adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment did not fulfill the hopes for equality that was the ultimate goal of the blacks of Kentucky. Decades of determined and persistent efforts were required to move toward a fulfillment of these dreams.[38]

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[1]William E. Woodward, *Meet General Grant* (New York: H. Liverright, 1928), p. 237. Source cited by James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York: Patheon Books, 1965), viii.

[2]Steven A. Channing, *Kentucky: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977), cited by James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), viii. p. 128. *New York Tribune,* May 3, 11, 1861. *Cincinnati Daily Commercial,* May 11, 1861.

[3]Harry Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: West Michigan Publishing Co., 1891), 116–17. Chauncey H. Cook to Mother, May 23, 1863, "Letters From A Badger Boy in Blue," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 4 (1920–1921), 433.

[4]Elijah P. Marrs, *The Life and History of the Reverend Elijah P. Marrs* (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert, 1885), 16–17.

[5]Allen Pinkerton, *Spy of the Rebellion, Being A True History of the Spy System of the United States Army* (New York: G.W. Carleton and Co., 1883), 187. Letitia P. Wallace, Nelson Furnace, Kentucky, April 1, 1861, Edmund T. Halsey Collection, Filson Club Historical Society.

[6]"Waukegan," Chaplain, Ninth Illinois Regiment, Paducah, Ky., to T.M. Eddy, *Northwestern Christian Advocate* (Chicago), September 25, 1861. "W", Camp White, Paducah, Ky., to Mother, September 15, 1861, *The Kenosha Telegraph* (Kenosha, Wisconsin), September 26, 1861.

[7]*Cincinnati Daily Gazette,* March 24, 1862.

[8]William W. Blair to Children, December 24, 1861, Bardstown, Civil War Letters of Dr. W.W. Blair, Indiana Historical Society. "W" to Editor, Camp near Lexington, Ky., August 27, 1862, *Ashtabula Sentinel,* Jefferson, Ohio, September 3, 1862. Letter from a Soldier, 22nd Wisconsin Regiment, Camp Wells, Ky., October 14, 1862, *Beloit Journal and Courier,* October 30, 1862. "Bogandus" to Editor, 23rd Wisconsin Regiment, Paris, Ky., October 27, 1862, *Wisconsin State Journal,* Madison, Wisconsin, November 5, 1862.

[9]William W. Blair to Children, December 24, 1861, Bardstown, Ky., Civil War Letters of Dr. William W. Blair, Indiana Historical Society. "Beta", Camp Haycraft, November 18, 1861, *Cincinnati Gazette,* November 23, 1861, "Justitia," to Editor, March 12, 1862, Twenty-Eighth Illinois Regiment, *The Schuyler Citizen,* Rushville, Illinois, March 26, 1862. T.J. Wright, *History of the Eighth Regiment Kentucky Volunteer Infantry* (St. Joseph, Missouri, 1880), 42. Chauncy Cook to Mother, April 10, 1863, "Letters of a Badger Boy in Blue," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 4 (1920–21), 332. B.F. Crary, Chaplain, 3rd. Minnesota Regiment, Fort Heiman, Ky., to Editor, May 6, 1863, *Northwestern Christian Advocate,* May 27, 1863.

[10]"W.J.G.", Newport, Ky., to Editor, October 7, 1862, *The Portage County Democrat,* October 22, 1862. "Dode", Camp Clay, Ky., to Editor, November 2, 1862, *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer,* November 7, 1862. For additional evidence that the Kentucky blacks understood the meaning and the course of the war as well

as the whites, see "M.N.H.S.," Co. B., Fifth Indiana Cavalry, April, 1863, to Isacc H. Julian, *The Indiana True Republican* (Centreville, Indiana), May 7, 1863, and "Carleton" to Editor, *Boston Journal,* cited by *Waukesha Freeman,* December 2, 1862.

[11]"T" to Editor, Camp Wickliffe, Ky., January 12, 1862, *The Jeffersonian Democrat* (Chardon, Ohio), January 24, 1862. "Otheo" to Editor, Camp Nicholas, Ky., October 10, 1861, *The Religious Telegraph* (Dayton, Ohio), October 23, 1861. A soldier stationed at Newport, Ky., told of a conversation he had with three Kentucky slaves who told him that the blacks were on the point of raising a force to fight for their freedom, but more conservative minds advised them to wait a little because the Army would grant them freedom. See "W.J.G.", October 7, 1862, *The Portage County Democrat,* October 22, 1862.

[12]"Senor," Owensboro, Ky., November 13, 1861, *Louisville Daily Democrat,* November 17, 1861. *Frankfort Yeoman,* January 17, 1862, cited by *Cincinnati Daily Commercial,* January 18, 1862. See *The Louisville Daily Journal,* July 17, 1862, citing *Madison* (Indiana) *Courier* for a similar stampede from Ghent, Kentucky.

[13]*Cincinnati Daily Commercial,* January 18, 1862, cited by *Frankfort Yeoman,* January 17, 1862.

[14]Alfred Pirtle, "My Early Soldiering Days," pp. 6–7, Alfred Pirtle Manuscripts, Filson Club Historical Society. P.S. Fall to Betty Fall, February 26, 1862, Philip Slater Fall Manuscripts, Kentucky Historical Society, (Microfilm Copy). Colonel John Cook, Fort Holt, Ky., claimed that "almost if not all the officers employed free blacks from Illinois as servants." See John Cook to John A. Rawlins, Fort Holt, Ky., December 25, 1861 *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), Series II, Vol. 1, p. 795. Hereafter *OR.*

[15]"Agate", Nolin, Ky., Camp Haycraft, November 7, 1861; "Vale," November 20, 1861; "Xenophan", Paducah, Ky., December 17, 1861, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette,* November 9, 17, 23, 1861. "Invisible," Mumfordsville, Ky., January 10, 1862, *The Daily Times* (Cincinnati), January 18, 1862.

[16]"Ed. T. P" to Editor, Lebanon, Ky., September 2, 1862, *Cleveland Morning Leader,* September 8, 1862.

[17]"Christian", Hopkinsville, Ky., to Editor, August 18, 1862, *Cincinnati Daily Times,* August 26, 1862. "Knox" to James Dumas, Editor, November 12, 1862, *Mahoning* (Ohio) *Register,* November 27, 1862. E.H. Bush, Chaplain, 49th. Ohio Regiment, Camp Wood, Greenbrier, Ky., January 17, 1862, *Cleveland Morning Leader,* January 22, 1862. Correspondence, Camp Mumsfordville, Ky., *Cincinnati Times,* cited by *Daily Zanesville Courier,* January 22, 1862.

[18]N.B. Hull to Daughter, Kentucky River, Kentucky, 96th. Illinois Regiment, November 14, 1862. "Carleton" to Editor, *Boston Journal,* cited by *Waukesha Freeman* (Wisconsin), December 2, 1862. Peter Bruner, *A Slave's Adventures Toward Freedom: Not Fiction, But the True Story of a Struggle* (Oxford, Ohio: Peter Bruner), pp. 41, 42.

[19]Narrative of Mrs. Mary Crane. Indiana Narratives. *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States,* VI, p 10. (*The American Slave: A Composite Biography,* Westport, Conn., Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972.)

[20]B.F. Crary to Editor Columbus, Ky., June 1863, *Northwestern Christian Advocate,* July 1, 1863.

[21]*New York Daily Tribune,* April 4, 11, 23; May 6, 1863, citing *Frankfort Commonwealth. National Anti-Slavery Standard,* April 23, May 9, June 11, 1863. *Louisville Daily Journal,* May 7, 1863. *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of Kentucky* (1863), 849. *Journal of the House* (1863), 1009. *Acts of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (1863), 362–64. J.T. Boyle to Selby Harney, December 9, 1862, Provost Marshall, Field Organization, Louisville, Letters Received, 1862–1865, Box No. 1, Record Group 393, National Archives.

[22]Joseph Holt to E.M. Stanton, April 24, 1863; Stanton to A.E. Burnside, April 29, 1863, Record Group 94, Office of the Advocate General, Generals' Papers, National Archives.

[23]*Nashville Union,* cited by *Grant County Witness* (Plattesville, Wisconsin), November 19, 1863.

[24]*Louisville Daily Journal,* August 3, 1863; February 23, March 1, 1864. *Congressional Globe,* 38th. Cong., 1st Sess., 1863–1864, pt. 1, 333–334, 338, 516, 598, 599, 768, 836; pt. 4, Appendix 102.

[25]George Parker to Commander, Dept. of Ky., November 20, 1864, Letters Received, Abstracts, Dept. of Ky., pt. 1, vol. 109, p. 356, Record Group, 393. W.H. Sidell to S.G. Burbridge, December 15, 1864, Provost Marshal, General, Ky., Letters sent, November, 1864 to Sept., 1866, vol. 23, pp. 117–18, Record Group 110, National Archives. "Humanitas", *New York Tribune,* correspondent, November 28, 1864, cited by *Louisville Daily Democrat,* December 6, 1864. *Senate Executive Documents,* 38th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 28, pp. 10–11.

[26]"Humanitas", November 28, 1864, New York Tribune, cited by *Louisville Daily Democrat,* December 9, 1864. Affidavit of Joseph C. Miller, November 26, 1864, "A Colored Soldier," Camp Nelson, in *Louisville*

Daily Democrat, December 9, 1864. *The Liberator*, December 9, 1864. T.E. Hall to Eluathan Davis, December 14, 1864, AMA Correspondence.

[27]"Report of Kentucky, Commissioners of Investigation of Colored Refugees," Senate Executive Document, No. 28, 38th. Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 21. John Fee to George Whipple, January 2, 1865, American Missionary Correspondence, Dillard University. "Affidavit of a Colored Soldier," Camp Nelson, Ky., November 26, 1864, Joseph Clark Miller; "Humanities" to Editor, New York Tribune, Camp Nelson, November 28, 1864, Louisville Democrat, Dec. 9, 1864. *The Liberator*, December 9, 1864. John G. Fee to Editor, *Louisville Daily Press*, March 27, 1865; John Fee to Editor, *Louisville Daily Journal*, May 27, 1865.

[28]T.E. Hall to Eluathan Davis, December 14, 1864, American Missionary Correspondence.

[29]Letter From Anonymous Correspondent to Henry Wilson, in *The Liberator*, June 24, 1864, Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall* of the Slave Power (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1877), III, 403.

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[32]*Grant County Witness* (Platteville, Wisconsin), June 11, 1863.

[33]J.S. Wheeler to Mattie Wheeler, January 13, 1865, Captain and Mrs. Leland Hathaway Papers, University of Kentucky. "Pontiac", Louisville, August 3, 1865, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, August 12, 1865.

[34]General Orders, No. 43, June 18, 1865, General John Palmer, in *Semi-Weekly Lexington Observer and Reporter*, June 28, 1865. *Louisville Daily Journal*, September 13, 1865.

[35]*New York Times*, June 4, 1865. John Palmer, *Personal Recollections of John Palmer, The Story of an Earnest Life* (Cincinnati: Clarke Press, 1901), pp 240–42; 254. *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 9, 1865. T.S. Bell to Joseph Holt, June 2, 1865, Joseph Holt Papers, John Palmer to Andrew Johnson, July 29, 1865, Letters Sent, February to December, 1865, vol. 1, p. 190, Dept. of Ky., Record Group 393, National Archives. John Palmer to Dave M. Payne, August 7, 1865, Letter Book of J.M. Palmer, p. 52. John M. Palmer Papers, Illinois Historical Society. *Cincinnati Daily Enquire*, August 3, 1865. *The Colored Tennessean* (Nashville) August 12, 1865.

[36]*Daily Frankfort Commonwealth*, June 8, 1865. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 2, 8, 1865. *U.S. Statutes, At Large*, XIII, 200. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Baster (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55), VI, 358.

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